

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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FRB-02 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 TRSE-00 XMB-07 OPIC-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0897

INFO USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL FLORENCE

AMCONSUL GENOA

AMCONSUL MILAN

AMCONSUL NAPLES

AMCONSUL PALERMO

AMCONSUL TRIESTE

AMCOMSUL TURIN

USMISSION GENEVA

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: ECON, SENV, TBIO, IT, WHO

SUBJ: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHOLERA EPIDEMIC ON MEZZOGIORNO

1. NEW RUMOR GOVERNMENT HAS ACQUIRED NEW PROBLEMS, AS RESULT OF NEGATIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RECENT CHOLERA EPIDEMIC IN NAPLES, BARI AND ELSEWHERE IN SOUTH OF ITALY. CHOLERA OUTBREAK HAS SEEN SHARP DECLINE IN TOURISM IN NAPLES AND NEARBY RESORT AREAS FOLLOWING CANCELLATION OF NAPLES AS PORT-OF-CALL BY SEVERAL PASSENGER LINES AND IMPOSITION OF SWIMMING BAN IN WATERS OF BAY OF NAPLES AND IN SWIMMING POOLS IN GENERAL. CANCELLATION THIS YEAR OF SEVERAL NEAPOLITAN SONG AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS WHICH HAVE UNCLASSIFIED

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BEEN MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE PAST ALSO WILL HAVE

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON TOURIST SECTOR.

2. IN WAKE OF RECENT CHOLERA EPIDEMIC, LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN NAPLES, BARI AND TARANTO AUTHORIZED DESTRUCTION OF MUSSEL BEDS AND HAVE IMPOSED GENERAL BAN ON SALE OF MUSSELS AND OTHER RAW SHELLFISH WHICH HAVE BEEN CITED AS MAJOR CHOLERA VECTORS. DECLINES IN CONSUMPTION OF FRESH FISH HAVE RESULTED IN CRISIS IN FISHING SECTOR THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH IN MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT FRESH FISH ALSO ARE CARRIERS OF CHOLERA. IN BOTH NAPLES AND BARI, LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE INTERVENED ON BEHALF OF UNEMPLOYED FISHERMAN IN PURCHASING LARGE QUANTITIES OF FISH FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION TO JAILS, ORPHANAGES, ETC. SECONDARY EFFECT OF FISH CRISIS HAS BEEN TEMPORARY CLOSING OF LARGE NUMBER OF RESTAURANTS.

3. CHOLERA-RELATED DECLINES IN CONSUMPTION OF FRESH VEGETABLES AND AVOIDANCE OF FRESH FRUIT BY ILL-INFORMED POPULACE IS CAUSING DIFFICULTIES IN FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SECTOR IN PUGLIA AND CAMPANIA. PROBLEMS ARE BEING COMPOUNDED BY DECLINES IN SALES OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES TO EC COUNTRIES AS FEAR SPREADS IN ITALY AND ABROAD THAT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE FROM CAMPANIA AND PUGLIA MAY BE "TAINTED". IN EFFORT TO REASSURE CONSUMERS, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FERRARI-AGGRADI RECENTLY MADE PUBLIC STATEMENT DECRYING WHAT HE CALLED "IRRESPONSIBLE AND ALARMISTIC" RUMORS ACCORDING TO WHICH FRESH FRUIT DANGEROUS TO EAT IN VIEW OF CHOLERA EPIDEMIC. PROBLEM IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN PUGLIA WHERE TABLE GRAPE PRODUCTION IS SIGNIFICANT AND WHERE CONSUMPTION OF TABLE GRAPES, VEGETABLES AND FRUIT HAS DECLINED MARKEDLY. SALES OF WINE GRAPES ALSO HAVE DECLINED AND SPECULATORS SEEK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT IS ALREADY A DETERIORATING PRICE SITUATION FOR PRODUCERS BY DELAYING PURCHASES IN EFFORT TO DRIVE DOWN PRICES EVEN MORE. THROUGHOUT PUGLIA AND CAMPANIA FRUIT AND VEGETABLES NOT BEING HARVESTED BECAUSE OF RAPIDLY DECLINING PRICES AND INABILITY OF PRODUCERS TO RECOVER PRODUCTION COSTS.

4. IN BELATED ATTENTION TO PROBLEM OF URBAN SANITATION, AUTHORITIES IN NAPLES AND BARI HAVE BEGUN HYGIENE INSPECTION OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISES AND HAVE CLOSED SEVERAL RESTAURANTS, MOVIE THEATERS, COFFEE BARS, ETC., WHICH ARE IN VIOLATION OF

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CITY SANITARY CODES. DURING HEIGHT OF EPIDEMIC, BARI AUTHORITIES PREVENTED OPENING OF WEEKLY OUTDOOR MARKETS AND SUSPENDED RELIGIOUS SERVICES IN CITY CHURCHES. THESE ACTIVITIES SLOWLY RETURNING TO NORMAL IN BARI AS CHOLERA EPIDEMIC SEEMS TO BE SUBSIDING. ON INDUSTRIAL SIDE, NAPLES BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS HAVE CITED SHARPLY REDUCED SALES IN LOCALLY-IMPORTANT CONFECTIONERY, ICE CREAM, FRUIT SYRUP AND FRUIT AND SODA BEVERAGE INDUSTRY SECTORS. MEAT, FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROCESSING AND

CANNING INDUSTRIES IN NAPLES ALSO REPORT DECLINING SALES AND INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES HAVE CALLED FOR FINANCIAL AND CREDIT ASSISTANCE FROM GOI TO HELP THEM RIDE OUT DIFFICULT SITUATION. INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES ALSO POINT OUT THAT FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM AND PRODUCTION LINES HAVE BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY SIGNIFICANT WORKER ABSENTEEISM DURING RECENT CHOLERA SCARE.

5. /COMMENT/: NEWLY-FORMED RUMOR GOVERNMENT HAS RECEIVED UNWEL-COME AND UNEXPECTED ADDITIONAL BURDEN BY VIRTUE OF ADVERSE PUBLIC AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHOLERA EPIDEMIC IN CAMPANIA AND PUBLIA. HOWEVER, SUDDEN AND DRAMATIC RE-EMERGENCE OF LONG-STANDING PROBLEMS OF POLLUTION AND URBAN SANITATION AND SEEMING INABILITY OF LOCAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES TO QUICKLY IDENTIFY AND REPORT DISEASE OUTBREAK TO NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OR TO CONTAIN DISEASE BY EFFECTIVELY QUARANTINING INFECTED AREAS OR QUICKLY PROVIDING PUBLIC CHOLERA VACCINATIONS POINT UP URGENT NEED FOR ACTION BY GOI ON LONG-AWAITED HEALTH AND OTHER REFORMS IN ITALY'S MEZZOGIORNO. PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM COMPOUNDED BY FACT THAT, WITH CREATION OF AUTONOMOUS REGIONS, PUBLIC SANITATION RESPONSIBILITIES IN LARGE MEASURE HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED FROM NATIONAL TO REGIONAL LEVEL, BUT WITH NO CLEAR DELINEATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES. IN ADDITION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH AT BOTH NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL LACKS ADEQUATE PERSONNEL FOLLOWING DECISION OF LARGE NUMBER OF SENIOR AND MIDDLE GRADE OFFICIALS TO RETIRE EARLY UNDER GOVERNMENT-WIDE REFORM PROGRAM.VOLPE

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